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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PREL PGOV KDEM KPAO RP

SUBJECT: EMBASSY MANILA MARKS HUMAN RIGHTS WEEK WITH ONLINE
CHAT

REF: A. MANILA 5749

1B. MANILA 5604

1C. MANILA 5521

1D. MANILA 5346

1E. STATE 202764

11. (U) Summary: On December 12, Mission hosted an online discussion to mark Human Rights Week, with participation from the GRP's Commission on Human Rights and a local human rights NGO. Participants in the chat reviewed U.S. advocacy of human rights and democracy, and the human rights situation in the Philippines. The discussion was broad-ranging and lively. Mission continues to conduct outreach activities for Human Rights Week; Poloff, for example, will speak to students on December 14 on U.S. promotion of human rights and democracy. Mission is also posting on its website President Bush's December 9 statement commemorating Human Rights Day and Week. End Summary.

Online Chat

12. (U) Mission hosted an online chat on human rights on its Virtual Consulate Davao website on December 12 to mark International Human Rights Week. In addition to poloff and conoff, Bernie Larin, Information Officer of the NGO Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PhilRights), and Edgardo Diansuy, Director for NGO, Civil Society, and Media Cooperation at the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHR) also participated in the online discussion and answered questions. (Note: CHR is an independent GRP body that investigates human rights cases. End Note.) In addition to Mission's informing a wide array of contacts about the event beforehand, an article entitled "Reopened US Embassy sets rights 'chat'" publicized the event in the "Philippine Daily Inquirer," a major local newspaper, on December 11.

13. (U) Full transcripts of the chat session will be available on the Virtual Consulate website (<http://www.usvirtualconsulatedavao.org.ph>) on December 15. (Note: Transcripts of previous virtual chats are also posted on the website. End Note.) Some highlights of the online discussion follow:

-- Larin of PhilRights highlighted the killings of political activists and journalists during the year, as well as extrajudicial killings in Davao (see refs A, C-D), and claimed that there have been no human rights success stories in these cases. Larin also emphasized that the government's primary responsibility was to protect its citizens and he asserted that the GRP was not doing enough in this area.

-- Diansuy noted that the CHR's current priorities were protecting and promoting the rights of Internally Displaced Persons and indigenous peoples, and advocating the abolition of the death penalty in the Philippines. He also emphasized that civil society and local communities play an important role in protecting and promoting human rights.

-- Participants in the online discussion asked questions about proposed anti-terror legislation; capital punishment; the rights of migrants; the role of the CHR in investigating human rights complaints; human rights advocacy at the U.N.; the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and the allegations that the U.S. practices or condones torture. (Note: In regard to questions in the latter area, poloff cited the Secretary's recent remarks on this matter. End Note.)

14. (U) At the conclusion of the discussion, online participants expressed their appreciation for Mission's engagement with the public on the matter of human rights. One participant noted how important such events were in the "battle for hearts and minds." Larin and Diansuy also expressed their interest in participating in future online chats on human rights.

Upcoming Outreach Event

15. (U) On December 14, poloff will speak to a group of

approximately 100-150 students at Silliman University in Dumaguete, Negros Oriental Province in the central Philippines, on the topic of "Promoting Human Rights and Democracy: A Cornerstone of U.S. Foreign Policy." The event will be part of Silliman University's ongoing lecture series in commemoration of International Human Rights Week. Poloff will also visit a USDOL-funded anti-child labor project while in Negros.

16. (U) Mission will seek further opportunities to highlight human rights issues, including during the rollout of the annual Human Rights Report in early 2006.
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